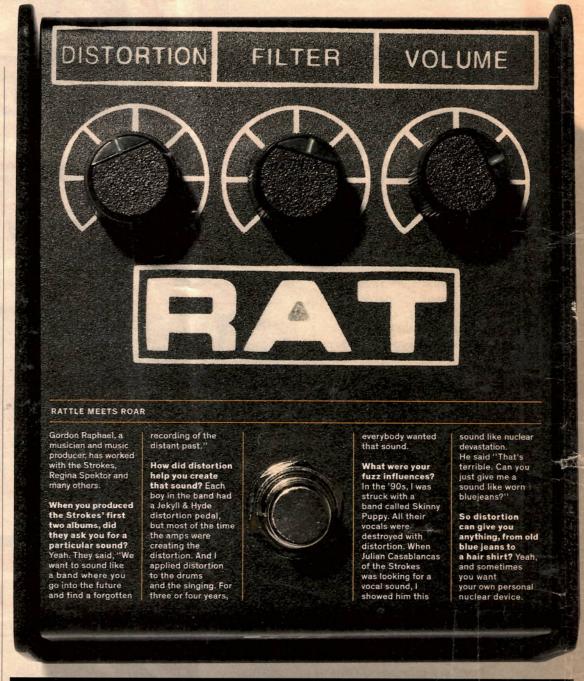
Who Made That? RAT DISTORTION PEDAL

"Yes, there were literally rats down there," says Scott Burnham, who in the mid-'70s hunkered down in a basement in Kalamazoo, Mich., in search of a new sound for garage bands. At the time, Burnham worked as Hippie in Charge of Technology - his official title - for a manufacturer of electric-guitar cables and accessories called Pro Co Sound. While customers wandered around the company's firstfloor showroom, Burnham tinkered below. "I had started thinking about what would make a killer distortion pedal," he says.

Distortion pedals have been around since the 1960s; they scramble the signal from an electrical instrument and make it sound "fuzzier." This is what adds growl to the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction." Burnham wanted to create a distortion pedal that would capture the essence of stadium rock - the buzz of an amp cranked to teeth-rattling decibels.

One day, as he was soldering parts to create a distortion machine, he picked up the wrong resistor and attached it to his circuit board. "Woooooo," Burnham howled, imitating the sound that the rig made. "I thought, This is something I have never heard." The shriek was far weirder than the fuzz effect he'd been trying to achieve, and he quickly built it into a pedal he named the Rat.

By the 1980s, Pro Co was shipping tens of thousands of Rats every year. "The biggest thrill was in 1985, when I saw a picture of Jeff Beck using my pedal," Burnham says. Rat pedals now populate music studios all around the world. "I never had children," he says, "so my kids are those black boxes out there." +



RAT PACK

These rock heroes created fuzzed-out anthems by stomping on a Rat pedal.



Joe Perry



David Gilmour Pink Floyd



Kurt Cobain Nirvana



Jeff Beck



Thom Yorke Radiohead